



CONNIE
AND
LENNOX

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“Hi there,” said Connie quietly not to scare away a little furry ball looking at him with big green eyes. “What’s your name?”

“I...I don’t know,” said the little furry ball.

“Ok,” said Connie. “How did you get here?”

“I... I don’t know,” replied the little lynx kitten.

Connie shifted his feet impatiently.

“Where is your mom?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” said Lennox and started sobbing.

“Ok, kiddo,” - said Connie softly. “ What do you KNOW?”

“I... I only know that I am very scared and lonely. And that I don’t trust anybody, and that the world around me is ugly and dark.” The lynx kitten started crying helplessly.

Connie, a big old California Condor put his huge wing around the kid. He knew the feeling.

The little Lennox looked at his new friend suspiciously. Condor looked quite scary... Enormous black feathered wings, a bald wrinkled head sticking right out, and a long ivory-colored bill. But there was something kind and even gentle about him. He looked wise and graceful, and for a short moment Lennox wanted to trust him, but then quickly reminded himself not to trust anyone again. He gave Connie another angry and suspicious look.

Connie was deep in thought. Yes, he knew that feeling. The world looked like a very ugly and dark place to him, too, the day when he was captured by bird hunters. And then, things went from bad to worse when he learned that all twenty-two of them were captured. The last twenty-two remaining California Condors in the world. He just couldn’t get it. He couldn’t understand why people did this as if it wasn’t enough that his species had already been almost extinct! They had been shot by farmers, poisoned by hunters, driven out of their habitat by museum collectors, and then the last survivors were captured and brought to the zoo. Even now, many years later, Connie’s head flushed when he was thinking about it. He was never able to hide his emotions, his bald yellow head turned deep red-pink every time when he was angry or upset. People even gave him a name – AC9. Oh, how he hated that name, and the people, and the whole zoo life...

But then, right there at the zoo, where they lived in their special “condor- miniums” he slowly started to realize that the world around him wasn’t all that dark and gloomy after all. People took good care of them, they helped them breed, they helped them get healthier, they helped their youngsters grow and get stronger. Connie still hated the stupid name and all that zoo life, but day by day he started to realize the reason why people had captured them. The last twenty-two California Condors were brought to the zoo as part of a recovery program - people tried to help their species survive. They even created look-alike condor puppets to help them feed newly hatched condor chicks.

Once their population doubled, the long-awaited day finally arrived. The Condors were released back into the wild. It was a big day for Connie. Not only because he was free again, but because he learned something important that day. He learned that the whole picture was always bigger than the picture you could see, that things were not always as they seemed to be.

His head turned yellow again. He looked down at Lennox. The little Iberian lynx kitten had cried himself to sleep under Connie’s big wing.

“Let me try to figure out what happened to this little guy,” thought Connie, and some seconds later he was already high up in the sky soaring, looking down at the open forests. He knew something must have happened to Lennox’s family, but he still had to figure out exactly what it was. He felt that people had something to do with it. But he hoped that they had something better in mind than just harming that most beautiful, the rarest, and the most threatened species of lynx.

Condor’s intuition didn’t let him down. Miles away he saw a zoo truck release Lennox’s mom and his two sisters into a new territory to help them find more food and start a safer life there. His heart was singing. But how could he help Lennox get his family? The release site was miles away, a long and dangerous journey for the little guy like Lennox.

Connie kept thinking about it as he was flying back to Lennox admiring his own huge shadow on the sand dunes and the open forests. When he reached Lennox the little lynx was still sleeping. By the time Lennox woke up Connie had his plan all thought out and ready.



For the next three days, all birds and animals around the forest could observe the most unusual show. A dark spot was moving fast across the land, and right in the middle of this spot a young Iberian lynx kitten was running as fast as he could, not stopping, not looking back, never doubting. Yes, he was scared, but every time his fear started to get the best of him, he looked up at the Condor flying right above, and remembered his words: “You are going to be scared, really scared, but you will keep running.” And Lennox kept running because being brave doesn’t mean you are not scared. It means you keep running even though you are scared.

It was a long journey, but as long as Lennox was running in the shade of Connie’s huge wing, nobody around could harm him.

When they reached Lennox’s family after all the happy jumping and joyful squealing Lennox’s mom told him that then they had more rabbits to eat than they could have ever dreamt of, that they would never be hungry again, and that Lennox and his sisters could now roam free and safe. It was a very happy reunion, and Connie’s bald head was happy yellow again.

Later that night, when the stars were shining bright in the dark sky, Lennox came to Connie, sat down next to him, and said: “I can’t fly high up in the sky like you Connie, but I think I am starting to see a bigger picture, too. Things are not always as they seem to be... And you know, the world is not such a bad place after all...” Connie smiled. He knew the feeling.



When only 22 California condors remained in the wild, San Diego Zoo was given permission to begin the first conservation-breeding program. Now there are over 425 California condors. About 220 condors of them live in the wild.

The Iberian lynx has been brought to the brink of extinction because of decreasing food base, being run over by cars, habitat loss, and illegal hunting. Despite the conservation effort taken to prevent the Iberian Lynx's extinction, the species' future is still fragile.



The project was launched within the framework of the ecological initiative of the Gazprom International Children's Social Programme Football for Friendship.

You can learn more about endangered animals and ways of their support on the websites of environmental organizations and reserves:

[The "Amur Tiger Centre"](#)

[International Fund for Animal Welfare \(IFAW\)](#)

[Sayano-Shushensky State Nature Reserve](#)

[Caucasian nature reserve](#)

[The Baikalsky Nature Biosphere Reserve](#)